

issue two

Profile

CA20N
L40
-P63



3 1761 12064143 6



Ministry
of
Labour



Management
Board
Secretariat

Inside: Ontario Public Service professionals with disabilities talk about their careers

Published by The Centre for Disability and Work, Ministry of Labour, with assistance from Management Board Secretariat's Employment Accommodation Fund for Persons with Disabilities.

Profile is also available in French, on audio cassette or computer disk, and in Braille or large print (in English and French). For copies, contact:

The Centre for Disability and Work
Ministry of Labour
400 University Avenue
10th floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1T7

Tel: (416) 326-7810
Toll-free: 1 (800) 465-5963
TDD: (416) 326-7561
Fax: (416) 326-6287

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1992

ISBN 0-7729-9282-7

Creative development and design: Public Good
Photography: Paul Francombe

Introduction

"DO WHAT YOU WANT TO DO AND GO AFTER

Jean-Marc Labelle, p.32

what you want." So says one Ontario government



employee, who has cerebral palsy. It's good advice for anyone to

follow, but not always easy for people with disabilities.



Lina Di Carlo, p.25



Tony Ojo-Ade, p.26

Yet in this magazine, you'll find the stories of 31

people, all Ontario government employees, who did just that:

a young woman,



Tracy Odell, p.22

institutionalized as a child and told

she would always be dependent, who now travels around the

province as a literacy consultant; a former athlete



Peter Hicks, p.10

who

spent five years in rehabilitation so he could work with young

offenders;



Brian King, p.24

a manual labourer who rose to become a

top government official after an industrial accident;



Lynne Swanson, p.21

and others. For many, it's been a struggle to develop their full

potential. But as



Margaret Kohr, p.3

people with disabilities grow in

confidence and the rest of the world sheds its



Margaret Goossen, p.6

stereo-

types, that struggle is going to get easier. ■

MICHAEL GAMBLE KNEW he was going to make it the day he scratched his nose. Injured in a diving accident near Sudbury, Gamble was left totally paralyzed. Although doctors said there was no hope, Gamble set a series of small, attainable goals. Soon he had some mobility in his upper

body and was able to use a wheelchair.

But he still didn't have enough movement for his original career goal, computer engineering. Instead he began taking part-time courses at Seneca College in Toronto to become a computer programmer analyst.

In the meantime, he applied for a summer job at the Ontario Science Centre. The interviewers were enthusiastic and very encouraging; he was the first disabled

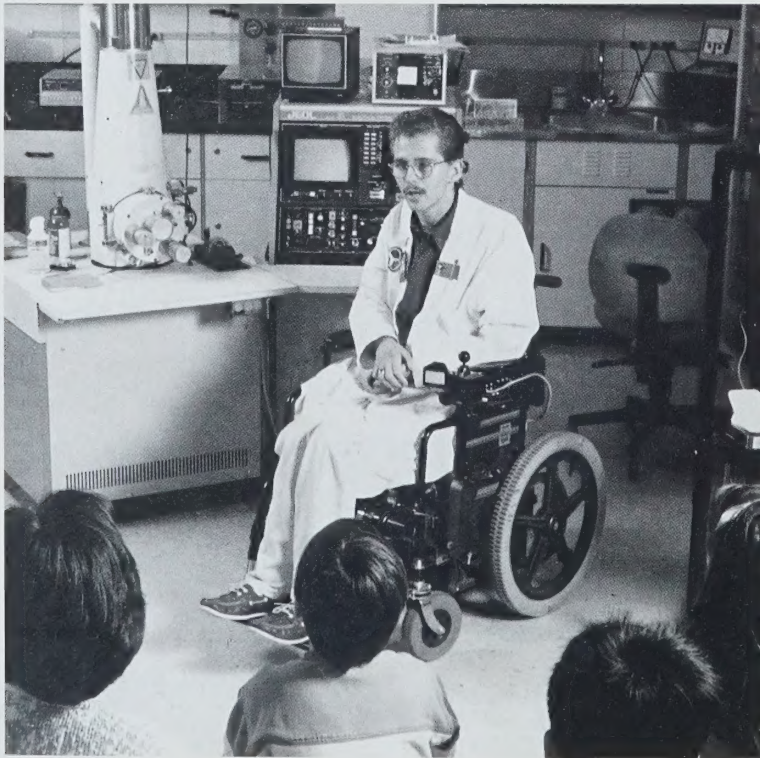
person who'd taken the initiative to apply for the host position. Management made the necessary renovations to the exhibit areas and replaced the usual hand-held mike with a radio mike to use during his electron microscope and human body demonstrations.

"The nice thing is, I'm not only a host," says Gamble, now 22, "it's almost like I'm part of the exhibits. People see me all the time in my white lab coat, obviously

working there. They ask me questions about my disability and they see for themselves that there is life after injury." The high point came when a fellow host told him, "You're not only opening my eyes to disability, you're opening the eyes of 49 other hosts and thousands of visitors."

Meanwhile, Gamble has found that his job at the Science Centre, where he still works part-time, has helped him in his return to full-

time studies at Seneca College "150 per cent! When I started school it really gave me confidence because I'd been dealing with the public all summer. It made me feel I was still worth something, that I could still do things, regardless of the disability. And that people regard me as a person, not an object." ■



"It made me feel I was still worth something, that I could still do things, regardless of the disability."



Margaret Kohr

Lawyer

IN THE FALL of 1986, Margaret Kohr told her husband, “If I were a car, my gas gauge would be constantly running on reserve.” Although, with a brand-new baby, it was natural for her to be tired, she found herself forgetting the names of colleagues at the Ontario Development

Corporation, where she’d worked as a solicitor for six years. “It was as if I had a really bad case of the flu with incipient Alzheimer’s.” When she learned she had myalgic encephalomyelitis, also known as chronic fatigue syndrome, her first reaction was relief that she wasn’t losing her mind.

But the initial two weeks of bed rest stretched into months. One day, she read the advertisement for what had been her job. “Then it hit me: I really was sick. I was stuck at home and the rest of the world was moving on.”

By early 1989, she began feeling more energetic, and the Ontario government employee counselling service suggested she return under

a “work assessment.” Although it was “terrifying” to return to work, she found her director and co-workers “were really willing to give me the benefit of the doubt.”

At first she experimented with short hours and small projects. Then she found a part-time maternity-leave secondment at the Ministry of Energy, a position that has stretched to almost two years. Her goal, when that ends, is to have a permanent part-time job.

Chronic fatigue syndrome is still a mysterious disease, so at 42 Kohr has no idea if she will ever totally recover. Although she’d like to have more energy – “It’s really appropriate that I work for this ministry,” she jokes – she’s pleased

that “I’ve reached a plateau where I can function effectively at a moderate pace. But I still have to monitor my commitments so I don’t over-extend myself.” Kohr believes her experience is a lesson for others. “Before I got sick I was giving and giving and not giving anything to myself. My condition has forced me to lead a more balanced life.” ■

“WHEN I WAS young I made a pact with myself that I was going to have it all – a family, house, career.” And by 1989, at the age of 33, Stan Piercey did. He also had too much stress and a chemical imbalance in his brain. As a result, he suffered a nervous breakdown and even became

suicidal. “I felt totally lost,” he recalls. “I lost my job, my family, my future.”

Living on his own in London, Piercey had to face up to the fact that, because of the chemical imbalance, he would have to take medication and would never be able to handle a high-stress management job again. “If too many things are going on at once it seems like a jumble to me and it takes time to figure it out.” He found an interim solution through a part-time job as a court services officer with the Ministry of the Attorney General, preparing courtrooms, calling witnesses, and keeping order during trials. Although the job itself is interesting, he says it also provides a useful bridge, keeping him busy and helping to pay the bills while he sorts out the rest of his life.

One of his goals is to get the balance in his life that was missing before. That means spending time with friends, playing sports, visiting his kids, and working with his counsellors as well as working at his job. “We all want the Great Canadian Dream. That’s what I was striving for and I just burned myself out. We all want so much, and when we don’t get it we feel like failures.” Now, he believes, his expectations are more realistic. “I don’t know what’s going to happen next, but if I eliminate some of the negatives from my life, I know I’ll do better. Being able to support myself and my family, that’s my main goal now.” ■



"They're getting the best of two people."



Kim Lehtinen / Georgia Whalen

Administrative Assistants

THEY'RE COMPLEMENTARY OPPOSITES sharing the same job.

Georgia Whalen is Deaf in both the medical and cultural sense of the word – she was born partially Deaf, grew up in a Deaf family and prefers signing, although she can also speak and lip-read; but Kim Lehtinen is coping with

the shock of suddenly losing much of her sight three years ago at age 35, because of diabetes. Together they assist the conference coordinator at the Ministry of Labour's Centre for Disability and Work in Toronto. "I'm Geo's ears and she's my eyes," explains Kim.

Kim works two days a week, handling the conference planning and organizational side of the job; Georgia works three days a week on networking and data. "So far

what's come out is the support Kim and I have for each other," says Georgia. "We have our own areas of expertise that fit well together." Kim nods: "They're getting the best of two people."

Both are on contract, however, so they're making future career plans. Georgia started off in factory jobs – "Deaf people are perfect for noisy workplaces. There's no fuss or muss with workers' compensation," she cracks. But through her

involvement with the Deaf community and a job at the Ontario Association of the Deaf, she realized she could aim higher. Now, at 27, she's studying for her bachelor of applied arts degree. Kim, who worked in catering and meeting planning before her vision problems began, has been examining the possibility of a career in human rights issues.

Meanwhile they're also learning from each other. Georgia, who's used to fighting for her rights – "I

usually get what I want" – at first found Kim "a little passive."

"Through Georgia's encouragement, I started to get my self-confidence back," says Kim. And what has "Geo" learned from Kim? "To smile more often," says Georgia, with a bit of a grin. "To be a little more mellow." ■



Margaret Goossen

Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor

“I DON’T HAVE a good leg to stand on,” jokes Margaret Goossen. Presently located in Burlington, she’s been an employee of the Ministry of Community and Social Services for 30 years, the last 15 in vocational rehabilitation services. For the past 10 years she’s put up with

the joint pain of osteoarthritis. After a number of personal losses, including the death of her husband last year, at 56 she decided to take time off for a hip replacement – probably the first of several operations.

While she recuperates, she loves to chat, in her rich Scottish-Barbadian accent, about the clients who’ve been her inspiration. “I’ve learned something from every one of them, even the most difficult.” As a welfare fieldworker in the 1960s, she recalls, “I was always interested in what one could do to help people return to the mainstream of the workforce.” Once the rest of the ministry caught up to her thinking, she was encouraged to move into vocational rehabilitation.

Goossen refers wryly to her current problems as “Rehabilitation 606, the practical course they don’t give you in university.” Ironically, she herself is now requesting the same kind of help that her clients need. That’s given her “a much keener appreciation of what my clients go through: how limited your energy resources are. How difficult it can be to get help from all the different agencies. How daunting the forms are. How impertinent the information requested can be. How you have to swallow your pride and open your personal life to others. It’s a humbling experience, but I won’t be any the worse for it.” It’s reinforced her view that everyone deserves a chance to make

a living and a contribution, and that all that’s usually required is a little give and take from employers – in her own case, a more comfortable chair and flexible working hours. With her professional and personal experience, she believes employers can’t lose. “If you’re supportive, in return you’ll get loyalty and employees who can develop to their full potential.” ■

“I WAS CONSIDERED a human scrap for whom there was no hope,” says Razaul Jabbar about his childhood in India. Left paralyzed below the waist by polio, Jabbar could move only by dragging himself around. But he developed a philosophy: “I must gamble with my life.” He began writing

short stories, which were published in India’s top magazines. And at 14 he learned to walk with crutches and leg braces to his hips. The same year, already a famous writer, he went away to university, eventually earning a law degree and a chartered accountant’s certificate. By his mid-30s, with a government job, a wife, a home, two children, and a career as a writer, he had defied all the predictions.

Then, in 1981, he gambled again, deciding to move to Canada. That meant switching to a wheelchair, because of the winter weather and bad experiences with too-quick elevators. Over all, however, Jabbar found he faced fewer *physical* bar-

riers in Canada. But there were other problems. His degrees were not recognized, and employers would hire him only on contract. He was repeatedly passed over for permanent positions. The one firm that did give him a permanent job went bankrupt.

Finally, in 1987, “I felt I must get some position that is permanent so I could get some peace of mind.” Now, at 50, he works part-time for the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, reviewing registration applications for small businesses – a job that has allowed him to work at other jobs during the day, including running a book-keeping business and, until recently,

working as a financial officer at the Ministry of Health. And he still writes for publications in India, Pakistan, and Great Britain. While he admits he’s working far below his capabilities, he’s content because his children are getting a good education. But he warns that “barriers of attitude are the biggest barriers. When an employer sees someone in a wheelchair, they take for granted he is incapable. They don’t bother to find out his degree of disability – or ability.” ■

“Barriers of attitude are the biggest barriers.”





John Feld

Writer

DESPITE HIS GOVERNMENT job, John Feld says his real passion is humour: “I’m a sit-down comedian – I’m not that good at stand-up because I’m not very good at standing up.” In fact, he once did a comedy gig during National Access Awareness Week, but “it was a dramatic, spectacular failure.

I think I’ll keep my day job.”

For most of his career that day job has been as a freelance writer and editor for various publications. He’s never been shy about telling his employers about his disability – he was diagnosed as having multiple sclerosis ten years ago. His biggest work-related problem is fatigue, and although he’s now having problems with balance and

uses a cane to walk, his disability has been invisible for most of his career. That can be tricky. “You don’t have any obvious symptoms, so people tend to think you’re a goldbricker.” But once he’s explained the situation, all of his employers have been supportive. “Fortunately, I’ve worked at places that are progressive and understanding.”

Although freelance work with

its flexible hours is often easier for him, he finds that by “working smart” and getting the cooperation of his employers he’s able to handle his current 9-to-5 office job as an information officer for the Office of the Employment Equity Commissioner in Toronto. He gets the heaviest work done in the morning and keeps a couch in his office for the nap he often needs in the after-

noon. At 43 he’s realized that he’ll never be able to work the 72-hour weeks typically expected of senior government officials – “It’s hard for me to work like a superperson.” But despite the limits on his energy, he says confidently, “I’ve never been criticized for doing an inadequate job.” ■

WHEN THE MAN in front of her confessed that he couldn't find a job because of his epileptic seizures, Heidi Kleiman knew exactly what advice to give him. Ten years before, when she learned as a student that she had epilepsy, she had to reassess her career plans. All the jobs she wanted in

criminology required a driver's licence, which, because of her disability, she could not obtain. "It was tough," she told the client. "But a lot of times in life you've got to look at what you can do, not what you can't."

She did know she wanted to work with people. Through the Epilepsy Association, where she worked as a volunteer, she learned about an opening as a student coordinator at the Centre for Disability and Work.

Now, at 31, she's an assistant to both the benefits manager and the health and safety manager at the Ministry of Labour, a job that brings her into contact with many other people with disabilities.

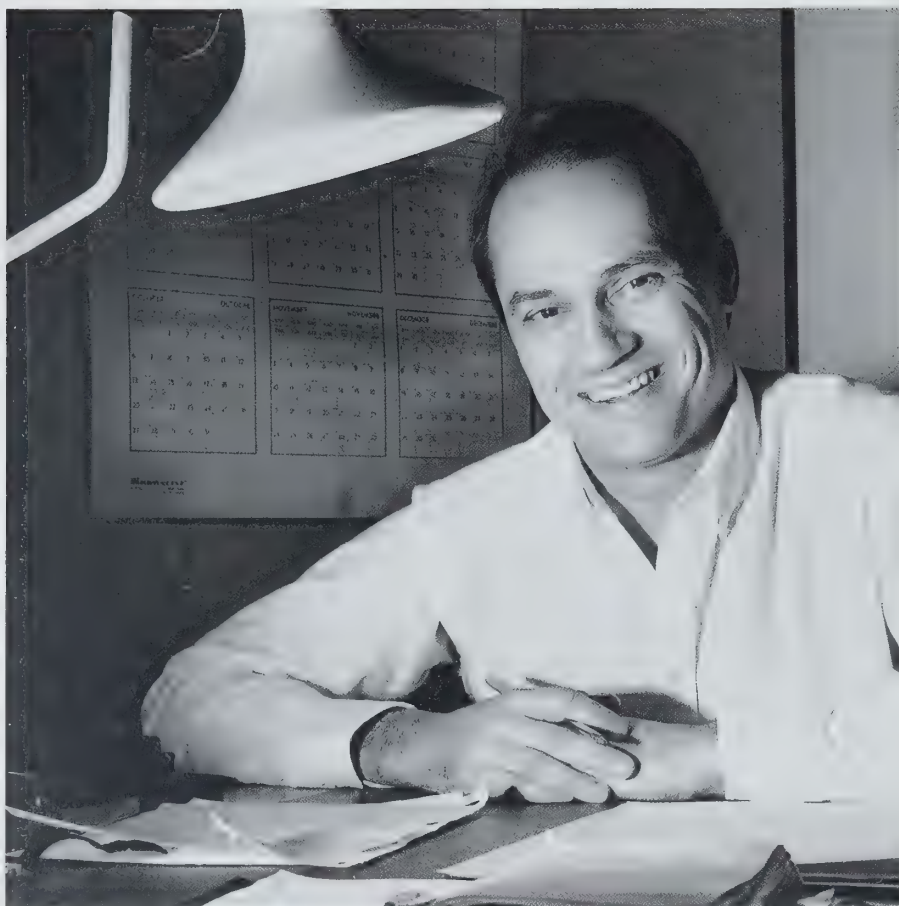
"I feel quite free to tell them that I've got a disability. Once they know about it, it's amazing how much more comfortable they feel talking about theirs."

She feels equally comfortable discussing her disability with her bosses and co-workers. "Everyone here knows about it, and frankly, we all forget about it." Although her epilepsy can be triggered by fatigue, flashing lights, or lack of oxygen, she's been seizure-free for the last three and a half years. However, she and her husband, a doctor, now want to start a family, and that means going off her medication, which can cause birth defects. She's hoping to negotiate an arrange-

ment with the ministry to work at home, where she can better deal with seizures if they occur. While her epilepsy still sometimes presents her with such special problems, she says, "More and more it's become just something on the sidelines of my life that I can cope with." ■

"A lot of times in life you've got to look at what you can do, not what you can't."





"Sometimes I can't believe how fortunate I've been."

Peter Hicks

Program Coordinator

THE DAY BEFORE he went into hospital to have a benign brain tumour removed in September 1984, Peter Hicks ran 15 miles. When he woke up from the operation, he could neither walk nor talk. Though doctors had warned him there would be some brain damage, he had no idea the

effects would be so severe. "It was a shock," he recalls.

But not enough of a shock to make him give up his dream of becoming a probation-parole officer. Back in his home town of North Bay, he concentrated for five years on rehabilitation, gradually moving up to a cane and learning to speak intelligibly.

Since he already had a degree in psychology and experience as a corrections officer, the Ministry of Corrections was more than willing to rehire him as a special projects coordinator for young offenders in

Guelph. While he's technically "part-time," at 37 he now puts in a busy week organizing recreation, running programs on dealing with anger and drug and alcohol abuse, and acting as a counsellor and supervisor. "A large part of my job is being a role model. A lot of these kids have never had a big brother or father." While his disability makes writing and phone calls difficult, he's learned to use it to his advantage by asking the kids to help. Hicks believes that being open about his weaknesses and giving young offenders a chance to empathize

and take responsibility is the best way he can help them.

It's a job that gives him a special pleasure. "I always swore to God when I was in the hospital that if I ever got out of this mess, if there was some way I could pay the good Lord back, I would. Sometimes I can't believe how fortunate I've been." ■

ROD IOI THOUGHT he was going in for a lung operation. But

he came out with impaired vision and coordination problems, after his heart stopped during the operation. ♡ Although his remaining years at university were “torture for myself and my family and others around me,” he success-

fully made the switch from pharmacy studies to social work. After he graduated in 1977, he worked in a variety of jobs around Toronto as a counsellor, and in 1986 he joined the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

He’s stationed on the front lines – one of the first people that a person with human rights complaints encounters. He determines if there’s a valid case, makes sure all the necessary information is collected, and

contacts the company involved to see if a settlement can be reached. As well, he does public speaking for the commission. Most clients don’t even realize he’s blind, until he has to read something. If there’s no one handy to read aloud, he uses a scanner to transcribe materials into his computer and a voice adapter to hear what’s on the screen.

Now in his late 30s, Ioi is pleased with his career – “I’d rather be doing this than pharmacy any day!” – but

he places just as much importance on the volunteer work he’s done, especially teaching Tai Chi. Not only has volunteer work provided him with stimulation, job references, and a good feeling, but at certain points in his life it’s given him a sense of self-worth and balance that might otherwise be missing. “One of the first things I did, after I went blind, was become a volunteer at the CNIB in the kids’ summer program. It gave me self-confidence, the

feeling that, hey, I could still do something. Sure it’s important to have a job. But our entire self-worth shouldn’t be tied up in that. Volunteer work, as well as jobs, offers people with disabilities a chance to feel good about themselves.” ■



Rod Michalko

Manager

“YOU CAN GIVE a person with a disability technical devices, and you can make a building totally accessible. But do the people in that building want a disabled person there?” 🐼 Rod Michalko has all the technical equipment he needs – a “Visual TEK” that magnifies text so that he

can read it with his five-per-cent vision – and co-workers “who’ve done more than accommodate me. They’ve made me feel welcome.” But he loves to use his job to challenge accepted ideas about disability and employment equity.

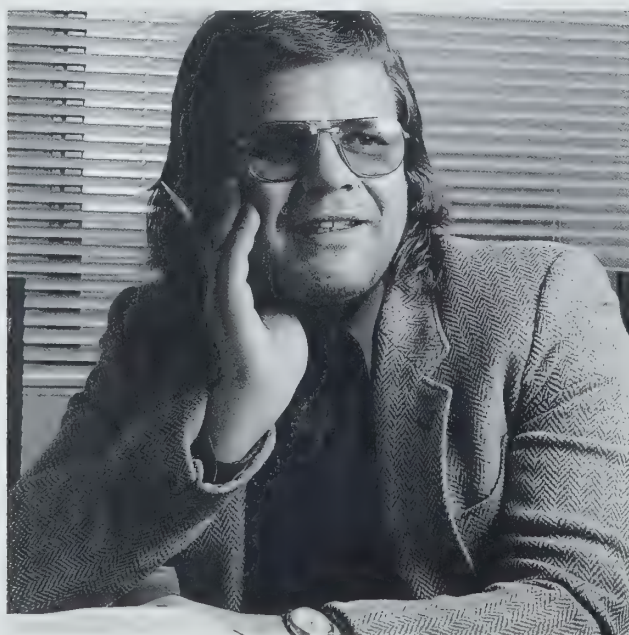
It’s something he’s been doing since he started losing his vision at the age of nine. At university, he recalls, “I wanted to be a professor and a scholar, but plenty of people told me I couldn’t do that.” He proved them wrong, completing his

MA and PhD in sociology and teaching at the University of Calgary. But when he moved to Toronto in 1989, in his mid-30s, he found there were no teaching jobs. So he accepted a job as an employment equity manager in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Although there’s a certain amount of administrative work, it’s the educational part of his job – conducting employment equity training – that excites him. “I’ve had employers say to me, ‘We hired a disabled person, and it

didn’t work out.’ I ask them, ‘Did you ever hire an able-bodied white male and it didn’t work out? Did you stop hiring them?’”

Sometimes the ideas that need to be challenged are his own. “I used to say, I’m a person who happens to be blind. But then a friend, who’s totally sighted, showed me that my blindness is part of me, part of the way I look at life.” As a result, he’s come to believe that anyone with a disability has a unique perspective to offer. For

example, he often picks up on nuances, such as the tone of a meeting, that others miss. True employment equity means making room for those perspectives. “Disabled people can bring a different point of view to the workplace, a different way of doing things. For employers, disability offers an opportunity.” ■



“Disabled people can bring a different point of view to the workplace.”



Liliane Lortie

Mammalogy Technician

LILIANE LORTIE'S WORKPLACE is full of bats and rodents and numerous other creatures, but that doesn't bother her. As a mammalogy technician in the Mammalogy Department at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, she looks after a whole library of animal specimens, cataloguing,

arranging loans with other institutions, and keeping computer records of the collection. She works with cupboards full of rabbits and mice; the stuffed animals, bones, and antlers in the antler room; hundreds of jars of pickled mammals, including baby bears and tiny dolphins; and a cold room full of furs donated to the museum.

She got the job in 1972 after graduating in biology from Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. In those days there was far less under-

standing of deafness, and Lortie, who lost most of her hearing when she was three, feels she was lucky to find work in her field. Deaf people have a double handicap because their disability is invisible, she finds. "As a result, many hearing people see deaf people as strange or mentally deficient." But at the ROM, "people are now open-minded and perhaps intrigued by the intellectual challenge of communicating with me. But of course it has been frustrating at times and requires a

lot of patience on everyone's part." She was delighted to find that several of her co-workers were willing to study sign language. Through a combination of signing, finger spelling, lip reading, and writing, she and her colleagues are able to communicate quite well, although there have been a few misunderstandings. "There was one secretary who was a very moral type. So when she told me she was taking belly dancing, I was very confused. Finally, after two years, I asked her how she liked

being a belly dancer. She laughed and laughed, then explained to me it was *ballet* that she was taking."

While she sometimes feels she would like to work elsewhere, she also realizes that would be risky. "So much depends on how much patience and understanding a new group of people would have with me." ■

“WHAT’S WRONG WITH you? Why does your hand do that? What’s the matter with your leg?” Once she found out Allanna Courte had cerebral palsy, her supervisor at a Toronto insurance company cafeteria fired her on the spot. 🗣️ “I said to myself, This hurts,” Allanna Courte recalls

now. “I’m not going to let it happen to me again.” After finding another job, with the Toronto Handicapped Company, she began taking business courses in her spare time. Then a friend told her about a job in the radio room of the Ontario Provincial Police Queen’s Park detachment. As an experiment, the Solicitor General’s office had decided to see if people with disabilities could handle the stressful shifts acting as command central for Queen’s Park security. She got the job.

Four years later, “there’s never a dull moment here,” she says with a grin. Working on shift, the radio room staff are constantly on the line with 60 security officers and eight OPP officers, 24 hours a day, seven

days a week, handling everything from thefts and protests to security for visiting royalty. Working over the radio, she’s personally handled such emergencies as a fatal car accident and the evacuation of a government building following an explosion. And in that stressful atmosphere, there’s no time for condescending attitudes. “When you do well, you get praised; when you screw up, you get yelled at. You’re treated like everyone else.”

Now, at 29, she’s been appointed acting supervisor, while the regular communications supervisor is seconded to another position. “My supervisor told me, ‘Allanna, you’re the mouthiest person I know, and if there’s a job to be done, I know

you’ll get it done.’” If her supervisor stays in her current job, Courte believes she has a good shot at taking the job permanently. In any case, she now has skills and experience that can be transferred to any OPP detachment in the province. “No one can ever fire me again for being disabled.” ■



“No one can ever fire me again for being disabled.”



Joe Fierro

Chemical Engineer

WHEN JOE FIERRO started his second year of chemical engineering at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto, he had 20-20 vision. But by the time he wrote his exams, his eyesight had deteriorated so much that he needed a magnifying glass to read the questions. By the end of the

summer his condition, Laber's optical neuropathy, would leave him with only 10 per cent of his vision.

Continuing his education was tough work. In addition to his 20 hours of classes a week, he spent another 20 hours transcribing the notes he had taped and listening to textbook readings. "A couple of times I was ready to give up," he recalls. But with the support of his family, friends, teachers, volunteer readers, and most of all his girlfriend, Janice, Fierro persisted. "A lot of people give me credit, but

there's no way I could have done it without this network of help."

Although his marks were good, he couldn't get a summer job the first year he went back to school. But the next summer he found an opening with Ontario Hydro, which led to a part-time job through the winter and a full-time job when he graduated, at 24, in 1991 as a graduate engineer trainee.

At Ontario Hydro he writes technical reports, obtains environmental permits, and is part of a project to make his department

function more effectively. Technology is what makes his job possible. A page scanner transcribes printed matter onto his computer screen. Computer software changes everything on his screen into verbal messages he can listen to over a headset. He has a Brailled typewriter for taking notes, a tape recorder for meetings, and a phone that beeps whenever he has messages.

As for his co-workers, "I can't think of a negative experience." But he also credits his own positive attitude. "I'm open and easygoing,

and I try to answer people's questions and make them feel comfortable." Fierro says he feels part of the team at Hydro and plans to stay. "Ontario Hydro has invested some money in me and in the equipment, and that's an indication that they think I'm worth the risk. I'd like to show them that they made the right decision." ■

Mary Lou Jorgensen

Office Worker

IN THE MIDDLE of a religious retreat in Grade 13, a blood vessel burst in Mary Lou Jorgensen's brain. When she woke up two months later, she recalls, "My mind was confused but still questioning." Although she eventually recovered most of her basic abilities and motor control, her

brain simply didn't work as well as it used to. From being a brilliant student, active in sports and student politics, she was barely scraping by and had to drop out after her first year in university. Even 17 years later, now 34, she says, "It hurt an awful lot. It still hurts. It will always be with me that I can't achieve what I want."

Still she carried on, taking courses, holding various temporary or part-time jobs as a courier and office clerk, trying to support herself and her husband, an academic with

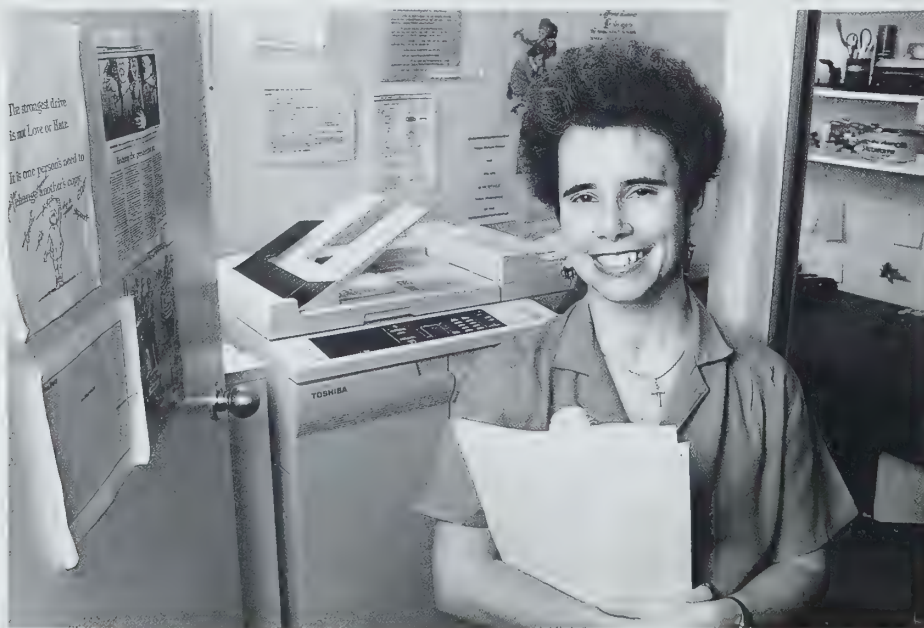
multiple sclerosis. "People ask me why I didn't collapse after my brain hemorrhage. But it's not part of me to do that." Finally, in the spring of 1990, she competed for and won a permanent job as a clerk at the Ministry of Labour.

Whatever else that moment of malfunction in her brain may have done to her life, it hasn't damaged her zest or her intellectual curiosity. She bounds up the stairs two at a time, as she explains her job. "The people here fascinate me – people who are in charge, who have power.

They challenge me and I challenge them." At the same time, she's careful to remember the "three Cs" – calm, cool, and collected – while she's on the job. "I get too excited at times, and then I have trouble concentrating." At first, she had difficulty coordinating her different jobs – faxing, photocopying, distributing, and running errands. But her co-workers helped her work out a system to clarify her priorities.

What's ahead for Mary Lou? Her husband died a year ago, which was tough. But now that she no

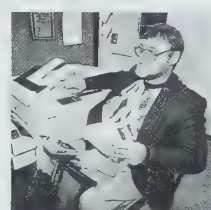
longer looks after him she has more time for other activities – cycling, reading, Bible studies, retreats, peace and development work, and writing to her many correspondents. "I've got to keep on growing and exploring new challenges. That's so vital to me." ■



"I've got to keep on growing and exploring new challenges."



"Now people with disabilities are much more in the mainstream."



George Livingstone

Personnel Clerk

GEORGE LIVINGSTONE REMEMBERS one of his teachers trying to get him to walk in class. "She kept saying, 'Come on, you can do it.' But I fell down too many times to make it worthwhile." Like a lot of the help he received after he had polio in the early 1950s, it was well intentioned

but not very effective.

Although he feels he was lucky to be sent to Variety Village as a teenager, it meant that instead of getting a high school education, he was trained in electrical welding, a field in which he couldn't get work. In those days, he recalls, "if they saw you coming, there were no jobs." Nevertheless, he persisted, taking any work he could get.

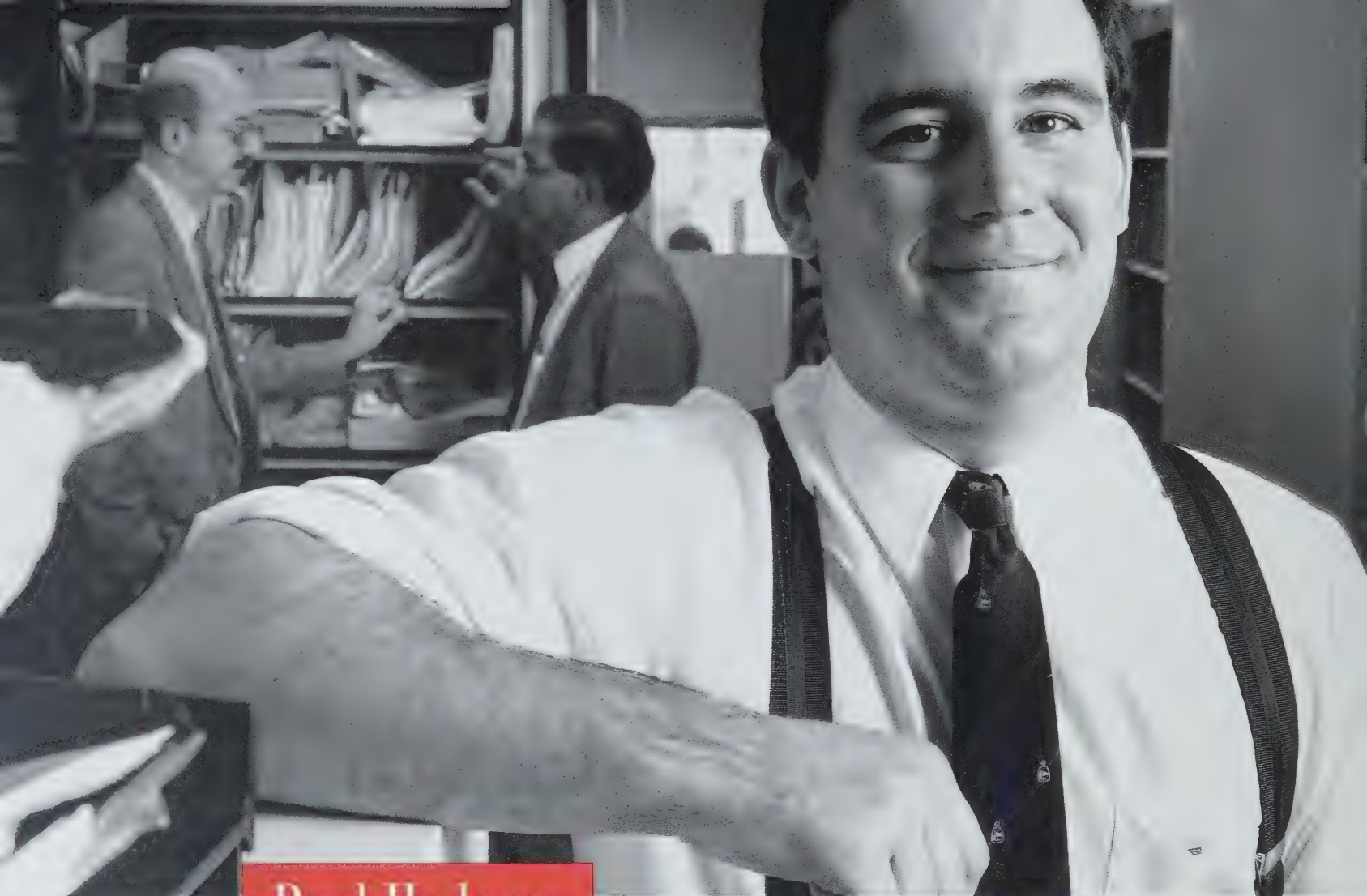
Then, tired of the Toronto rat race, he and his wife decided to move back to his home town, Britt, on Georgian Bay. It would be ten years before he found another permanent job. In the meantime, he studied accounting at Cambrian College in Sudbury, then moved to North Bay to take a job with

Supply and Services Canada. When the Ministry of Correctional Services announced it was moving its head office to North Bay, he applied for and got a job.

Although he still walks with a lift on his shoe and leg braces and uses crutches, he now also has a scooter to conserve energy. Like many people who had polio as children, Livingstone, now 48, is experiencing "post-polio" syndrome, a recurrence of the original pain and fatigue. Using a scooter is no problem, since the building where he works is fully accessible, and "it really takes the edge off. Otherwise I'd be tired by the time I arrived in the morning." He finds the job, keeping personnel records up to

date and fielding questions on policy, a challenge.

Although he agrees that his career has been "a struggle," he's proud of his accomplishments. "Once I'd worked someplace, I don't think my employers would hesitate to hire a person with a disability again, as long as they could do the job. People like me were ground-breakers. Now we're much more in the mainstream." ■



Paul Hodgson

Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor

PAUL HODGSON FINISHED his first year of nursing in the top half of his class – but the faculty told him he couldn't continue. Because of his learning disability, the school believed he would be a danger to patients. Hodgson believes his tendency to juxtapose words and make spelling and

grammatical errors could have been accommodated. "But they had an easy solution – get rid of him."

"But you always find new dreams," he says. With the help of his vocational rehabilitation counsellor at the Ministry of Community and Social Services, he investigated other careers where he could use his nurturing skills. He decided on the rehabilitation worker course at Humber College, where the staff also showed him ways of using computer programs to compensate for his writing problems.

A few months after graduation, he was interviewed for a job as a vocational rehabilitation caseworker

with the Workers' Compensation Board in Kitchener. "It's a very paper-oriented job, so I was a little worried. But they were very supportive." The board supplied him with special software and a laptop computer. Now he travels between Kitchener, Owen Sound, and the central office in Toronto, writing reports and helping injured construction workers regain their self-confidence and get back on the job.

"I know what some of the workers are going through," he says. "For me there's always the fear that someone's going to come in and say you can't do such-and-such because of your disability. I know it won't

happen, but the old ghosts are always there." At 27 his outlook is bright. Recently married, he plans to complete his university education after his wife has finished school. "I've always wanted my degree. A lot of people told me I wouldn't get through grade school, high school, or any type of post-secondary school. But now the whole future has opened up." ■

Susan Conrad

Policy Analyst

“WHAT’S GOTTEN ME through,” says Susan Conrad, “is learn-

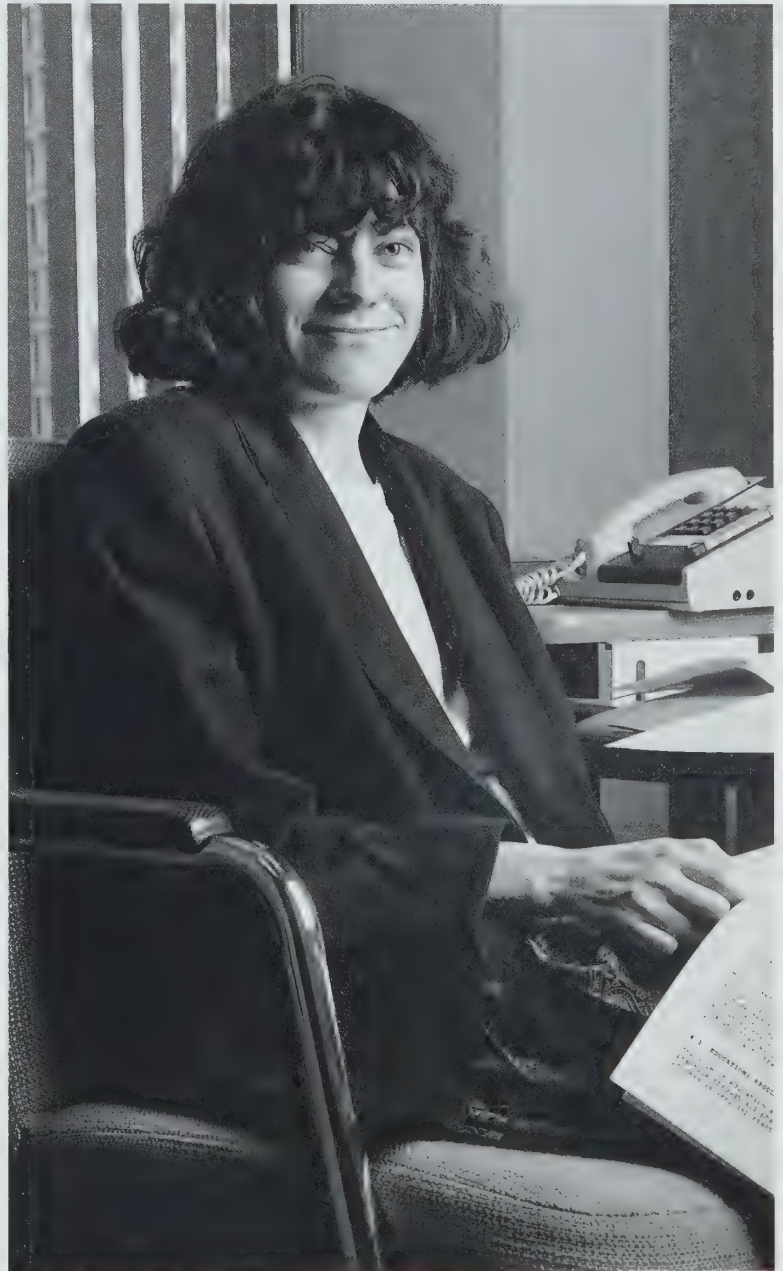
ing to balance the serious issues with a sense of humour.” As a result, she’s learned to laugh about the many times when others leap to the wrong conclusion about how to be helpful. Conrad, who has a neuromuscular illness,

remembers the day she was walking on a busy street with a friend who uses a guide dog. Susan was wearing sunglasses and carrying a cane. A passing motorist, assuming both women were blind, stopped his car, jumped out, and hustled her across the street. “I had no intention of crossing the street and the woman I was with was not impressed.”

Her sense of humour has had a real workout in the last three and a half years. At 26, just called to the bar, she learned of her illness, which at this stage has left her with limited use of her legs and hands and, in many potential employers’ opinion, unemployable. But her longstanding interest in human rights and volunteer work suddenly took on a personal tone. After stints with the Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped (ARCH) and the Office for Disability Issues, she was chosen as part of the team doing background work to

prepare for the implementation of mandatory employment equity.

Employment equity is a complex issue with sweeping implications, and Conrad speaks about the policies she’s researching with sensitivity. “Because employment equity is looking at the barriers to full participation by all groups – aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, racial minorities, and women – then it’s also looking at barriers in every other context. It’s not just employment that we need to look at, it’s transportation, education, and housing. Employment equity fundamentally affects the way we live our lives, the direction we go in as a society.” She feels she has a personal investment in the work she’s doing. “Our capacity for kindness, compassion, dignity, and respect toward each other is ultimately what makes us whole.” ■



IN SEPTEMBER 1990, the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority found itself with a tremendous backlog of maintenance orders. To solve the problem, they hired Ron Feher. Working out of four different offices, he got the job done in three months, handling as many as 350 orders

in one day. Pretty good for a kid who had so much trouble concentrating in school, he could hardly stay awake.

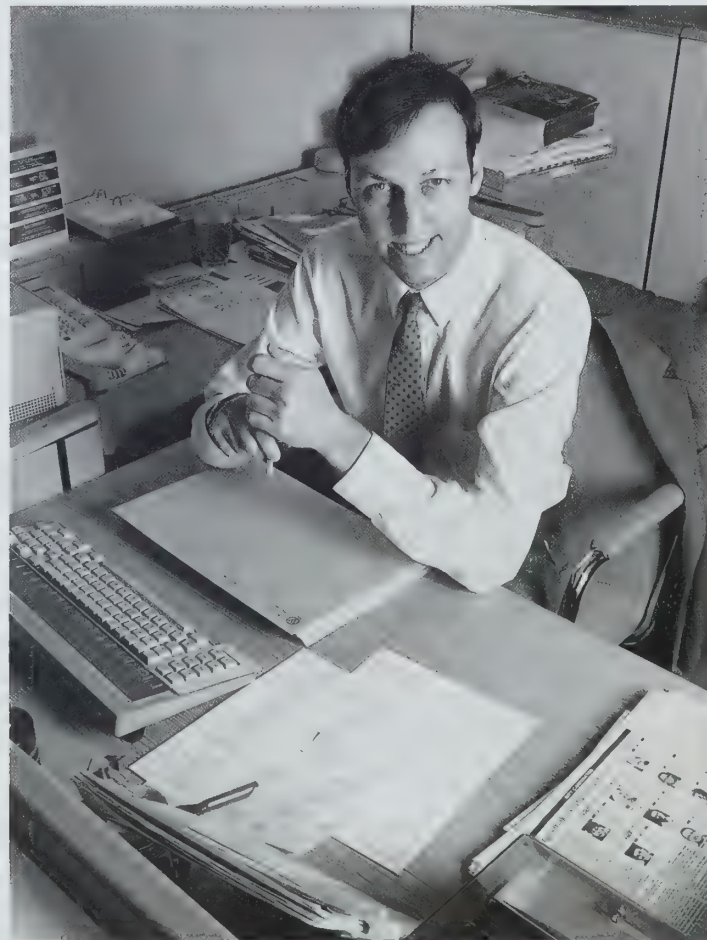
Ron Feher grew up with a learning disability, which even now isn't completely understood. As a child, he was hyperactive and had a very short attention span. As a result he did poorly in school and became withdrawn. "The intelligence was there, but the concentration wasn't," he explains. Fortunately, his teachers spotted the problem, and at 15 he started getting the educational help and counselling he needed. But breaking into the job market

has required a lot of determination on his part. "I needed to develop inner confidence, the knowledge that I can put my mind to a job and get it done quickly and accurately."

Since he got his Grade 12 diploma in 1984, he's only been able to get short-term contract work. However, the Ministry of Housing was so impressed with his work at the Metro Housing Authority that they invited him back. He is presently on contract at the Toronto City Office of Rent Review Services as a clerk. His current goal is to acquire a permanent job in the government using computers. Though the job

market is tight, he's tackling the project by continuing to work on his self-confidence and submitting as many applications as possible. "Through perseverance, eventually it will happen. I know now that I can do the job. There's been a steady progression of things getting better in my life." ■

"There's been a steady progression of things getting better in my life."





Lynne Swanson

Human Resources Coordinator

“Often if the employer and the employee can sit down and talk about their needs, they can strike a balance.”

LYNNE SWANSON TALKS about her career with the clarity of a master chess player – just what you’d expect from a regional human resources coordinator for the Ministry of Community and Social Services in London. ♣ Although she enjoyed her first job at the ministry, working

with sole-support mothers and people with disabilities, she decided to take a job with a community college in order to reach her ultimate goal of becoming a human resources administrator. Then, one Sunday morning seven years ago, she woke up with a mild pain behind her right eye. Four days later, she had lost her vision in that eye. Although her vision returned, it was the first symptom of multiple sclerosis. But she kept to her path, moving to Toronto to work for the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Technology and the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation to further develop her skills.

When she was offered her current job, initially she was concerned that her disability might get in the way, since the position involved a lot of travel. “But my

regional director made it very clear he wanted to do everything he could to work with me. He was making suggestions for accommodations before I even thought of them.” Now 40, she finds that fatigue and difficulties with mobility are her greatest problems, so she frequently travels to destinations the day before a meeting and sometimes works at home.

The tricky thing about MS, she says, is that “my symptoms aren’t stable. One day I may need a disabled parking space, the next day I may not. So the important thing is for my employer to be flexible.” But because of her job, she also understands that employers are concerned about whether disabled employees can really do the job. “Often if the employer and the

employee can sit down and talk about their needs, they can strike a balance. And once you’ve figured out the accommodations necessary, you can turn to various agencies for help.” Although she’s found employers are often nervous at first about hiring people with disabilities, “once they do, many say they’d do it again in a minute. It’s just breaking through the barrier and getting in the door.” ■

Tracy Odell

Literacy Consultant

ACCORDING TO THE staff at the institution where Tracy Odell lived from the age of seven to 18, she should still be there, helpless and dependent. Instead she travels around the province, coordinating literacy programs. “I never saw the fact that I was a wheelchair user as a disability,

any more than other people feel disabled because they can’t fly.”

Fortunately, she was able to attend an outside high school, then study education at York University. There she learned she could handle “every classroom situation you could imagine” – including teaching a group of emotionally disturbed children. “If you’re in a wheelchair and you can stop someone from throwing a chair at you with a word, that’s a pretty good skill.”

There were no teaching jobs when she graduated, however, so she took a job coordinating literacy programs for Frontier College. Much of her work involved reaching people with special needs – those with disabilities, in jail, or on welfare, for example. Through her highly successful program and her writing on the subject, she became an acknowledged expert. So when the Literacy Branch of the Ministry of Education went looking for someone who could help make their

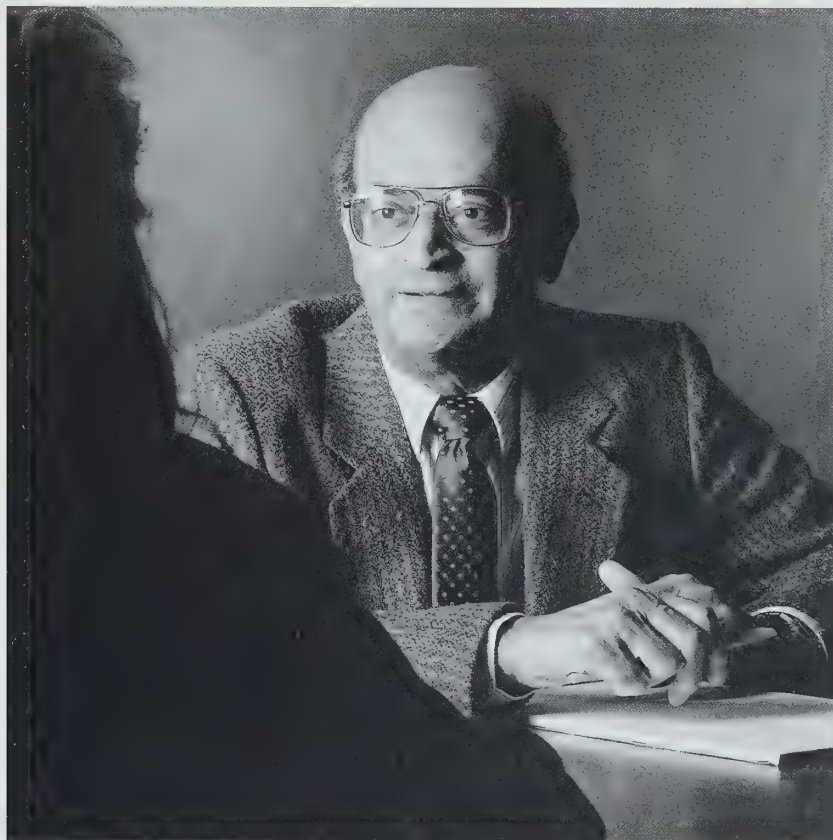
programs more accessible, she was the obvious choice. “I pointed out that I would need an attendant when I travelled – were they really sure I was the one they wanted? But there wasn’t anyone else with my training and my experience of the issues.” Although she felt honoured to get the job, she also points out that “it’s not a token job created for someone with a disability – it was a job that needed to be done.”

Now, at 33, a mother of two, she spends her time supporting various community literacy programs, organizing training, administering grants, and writing reports. She’s excited about having an influence on nearly 300 literacy programs across the province. “I want them to include everyone in their community and see that everyone has a contribution to make, even if it isn’t the traditional contribution. Up to 25 per cent of the community has some kind of disability – it’s normal.” ■



**“I never saw the fact that I
was a wheelchair user as a
disability, any more than
other people feel disabled
because they can’t fly.”**

"I thought it was the end of the world. But hope kept me going, and here I am today."



Suk Gupta

Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor

"MY JOB IS to help people get training so they can find gainful employment," says Suk Gupta. No one knows better than he does how important that is. In 1970 he found himself with a wife and two-month-old baby to support, an academic career in ruins and – thanks to poor

circulation and medical bungling – minus his left leg below the knee.

Giving up his plans to study in England, Gupta concentrated on his rehabilitation, then moved his family from Kitchener, Ont., to Toronto. His wife found a job, but with four master's degrees he was considered overqualified. "I used to cry about having to take social assistance," he recalls. He applied for hundreds of jobs, even seeking the help of a cabinet minister.

Finally, in 1974, he found work at the Whitby Psychiatric Hospital. The next year he was selected to run the Reactivation Program, an in-house rehabilitation workshop that allowed patients to develop working skills and a greater sense of self-esteem. Thanks to Gupta's studies and practical experience in industrial management, the program soon became a star attraction for rehabilitation personnel all over the province. "We were producing

faster and better quality than any other hospital program." More importantly, the patients' attitudes improved, and several were able to move out of the hospital.

Today Gupta, close to retirement, continues his counselling work at Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Ministry of Community and Social Services in Kingston. At the office he insists on a distant parking spot because he needs the exercise. Since he walks on his

prosthesis without crutches, his disability isn't obvious. But he does tell some clients. He remembers one difficult case, who insisted on seeing his artificial leg. "After that, he became a different person." His message to his clients? "Don't give up hope, because hope is the thing that keeps us going. I thought it was the end of the world. But hope kept me going, and here I am today." ■

Brian King

Senior Administrator

BRIAN KING OWES his impressive career in government and labour relations to the accident he had at 24, working on an oil rig in Saskatchewan. While still in intensive care, he was visited by a Workers' Compensation Board counsellor, who pointed out that, with one leg ampu-

tated above the knee and the other crushed and weakened, he'd no longer be able to do physical labour. "That may seem cruel, but it focussed my mind wonderfully. I decided I had to pursue a more white-collar approach to employment."

While taking physical rehabilitation during the day, he studied university courses at night. Fascinated by Shakespeare, he concentrated on English literature and was on the verge of writing his MA dissertation when he got a phone call from the Saskatchewan Labour Ministry.

They were setting up the first-ever "worker advocate" program. Within a few weeks, he was in the job and deluged with requests.

Eighteen years later, at 48, King still hasn't finished his thesis, but he has built a first-rate reputation as a consultant, mediator, writer, and public speaker on labour relations and as an innovative administrator; moreover, he has been chair of the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Boards and is now the vice-chair of administration of the Ontario Workers'

Compensation Board in Toronto. Though his own disability has created few barriers, his stay in the rehabilitation hospital – seeing people with a variety of disabilities, listening to three paraplegics on his ward debate their situation, eating lunch with disabled children "who never felt sorry for themselves, no matter how awful their problems were" – both sensitized him to disability issues and "helped me see that my lot in life was not that tough."

Now, with 5,000 employees and seven vice-presidents reporting to

him, Brian King looks back and comments, "It's very ironic that a work injury in rural Saskatchewan should have brought me this far. If it weren't for my disability, I'd probably still be working the rigs, somewhere in Indonesia or Kuwait." ■





Lina Di Carlo

Manager

PITY THE POOR official who tried to tell Lina Di Carlo that she couldn't become a citizen because she couldn't contribute to Canadian society. Di Carlo moved to Toronto from Italy with her family when she was 12 but didn't qualify as a landed immigrant because she had polio. Five

“Employers should demand and get the same standards from employees who are disabled that they do from anyone else.”

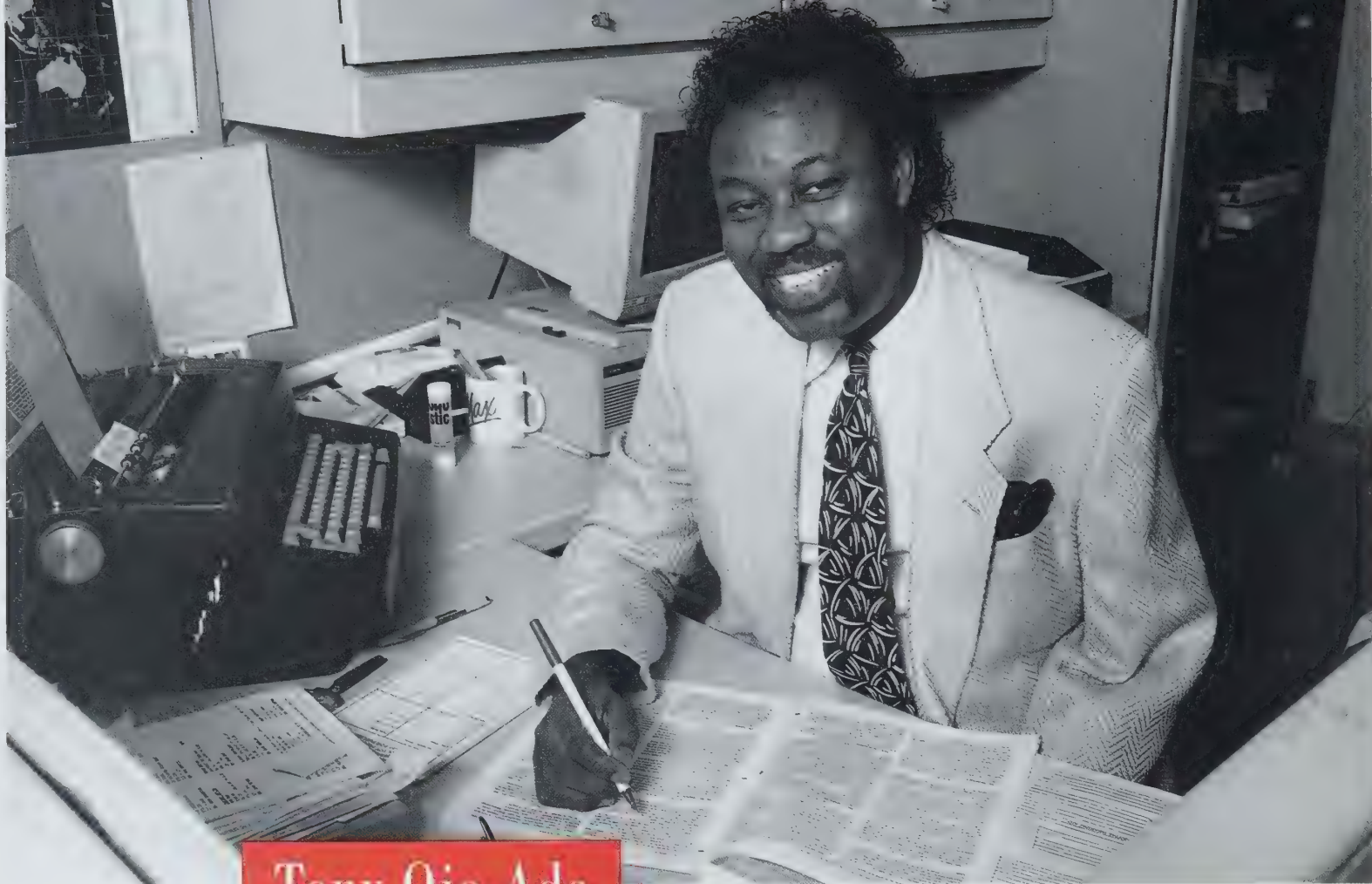
years later, when she was preparing for language studies at York University, she discovered she wasn't eligible for student loans. She took her story to the media and was granted citizenship on compassionate grounds.

And she went on fighting for her rights wherever she went. When she found that classrooms at Laval University, where she visited as a high school student and then studied for her master's degree, were not accessible, she agitated for – and got – a ramp. At her first job, in a hotel, “I had to travel in the freight lift. Quite often it was me and three bins of garbage.” But her persistence and her value as a bright, hard-working employee meant she usually got what she needed. At the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, she found that

the only accessible washroom was on the first floor – 17 floors below her office – so she persuaded the maintenance staff to fix the washroom door on her floor so it would swing out. Then she pushed for a properly accessible washroom.

Di Carlo has done many jobs as she has advanced through the government ranks. Now, in her mid-30s, she's the manager of the Official Languages Monitor Program for the Ministry of Education in Toronto, overseeing a federally funded exchange program for students, similar to the one that took her to Laval as a teenager. Over her 11 years in the public service, she's found that her bosses and co-workers have become more sensitive to her needs. But she's insistent that people with

disabilities must “keep continuously fighting for their rights.” They must also learn to present themselves properly. “If you apply for an office job, you have to look like you belong there. Employers should demand and get the same standards from employees who are disabled that they do from anyone else.” ■



Tony Ojo-Ade

Information Officer

**“If you think I
can’t do some-
thing because I’m
disabled, then
you have a real
problem.”**

TONY OJO-ADE CAME to Canada from Nigeria with a dream to become a journalist. After finishing courses at Humber College in 1978, he started searching for a job. That’s when his disability – he lost his left arm above the elbow in a freak accident when he was 12 – started getting

in the way. “When you are called for an interview the person doesn’t know what you look like. Then you show up and you’re black and missing one hand, it’s a double whammy.”

While searching, “I worked at all the dirty jobs my hand would allow me to do.” He also volunteered at a local cable company, gaining experience in all aspects of TV production, as well as taking courses in sound production, computers, and everything else that he thought could help. Meanwhile, through his participation in disabled sports, he met then-premier Bill Davis, who helped him find a job with Go-Temp, the Ontario government temporary employment service. He went on to work in a variety of radio, communications, and office jobs. Then in

1990, unemployed again, he found a permanent job with the Office for Seniors’ Issues in Toronto, helping senior citizens find answers to problems with housing, health, and pensions.

Now in his late 30s, Ojo-Ade feels the job is the long-delayed payoff for his years of struggle. “The beauty is that it’s all come together. I’m using my computer skills, my journalism, and my communications experience.” He also gets a special kick out of dealing with seniors. “Their problems are quite similar to what people with disabilities go through. They also suffer from stereotypes.”

He’s developed his own philosophy about stereotypes. “If you think I can’t do something because I’m

disabled, then you have a real problem. I’m a fighter, not a quitter. I never want to sit and be the ward of any government. All I want is to function in society, like anybody else – because having one hand doesn’t write me off in life.” It’s a message he’s passing on to his 11-year-old son. “If you set your mind to something you can do anything you want to do.” ■

Ruth Phillips

Office Worker

ALL THE WAY through school, the other kids made fun of her, even the ones who had their own problems. “My teachers kept telling me to ignore them,” Ruth Phillips remembers. “But I’d get mad and tell them off – even the ones who wanted to beat me up.” ♡ It’s hard to imagine this

quiet, well-dressed young woman, now 26, yelling at anyone. But Phillips has a drive that keeps her in the job market despite her developmental disability. Her original goal was to be a daycare worker, but she found the college course was too tough. Then friends told her about the training centre of the Metropolitan Toronto Association for Community Living. “They helped me see what jobs I could do.” After training in clerical work, she got a job with a research firm, photocopying microfiches. But after two years, the firm restructured and Phillips found herself out of a job. Fortunately the association’s job counselling service found work for her with the Ministry of Health.

In her previous job, she’d had only one main duty, so at first she had a difficult time adapting to handling a variety of work – photocopying, collating, sending faxes, running deliveries, handling mail, and setting up for meetings. And her new co-workers had higher expectations of her. “It was difficult at first,” she recalls. “Some days I just felt like leaving.” With the help of her job placement counsellor, she was able to explain to her co-workers the help she needed and to acquire the skills for her new job. Now her co-workers are encouraging her to learn more new skills, such as typing. There are still frustrating days, however, especially “when they have so much work and they

all want it done at the same time.”

Eventually, she’d like to get into daycare, but for now she’s happy to be earning her way. What would she say if she saw those kids who used to tease her? “I’d tell them I’m not so dumb after all.” ■



Joyce Main

Consultant

JOYCE MAIN STARTED her contract with the Ontario government by saving them thousands of dollars. Because she's legally blind, they assumed she'd need expensive equipment to do the job. In fact, her requirements were reasonable. "Like the candidates I coach for government jobs,"

she explains, "when I accepted this contract I knew exactly what accommodation I needed and how much it would cost."

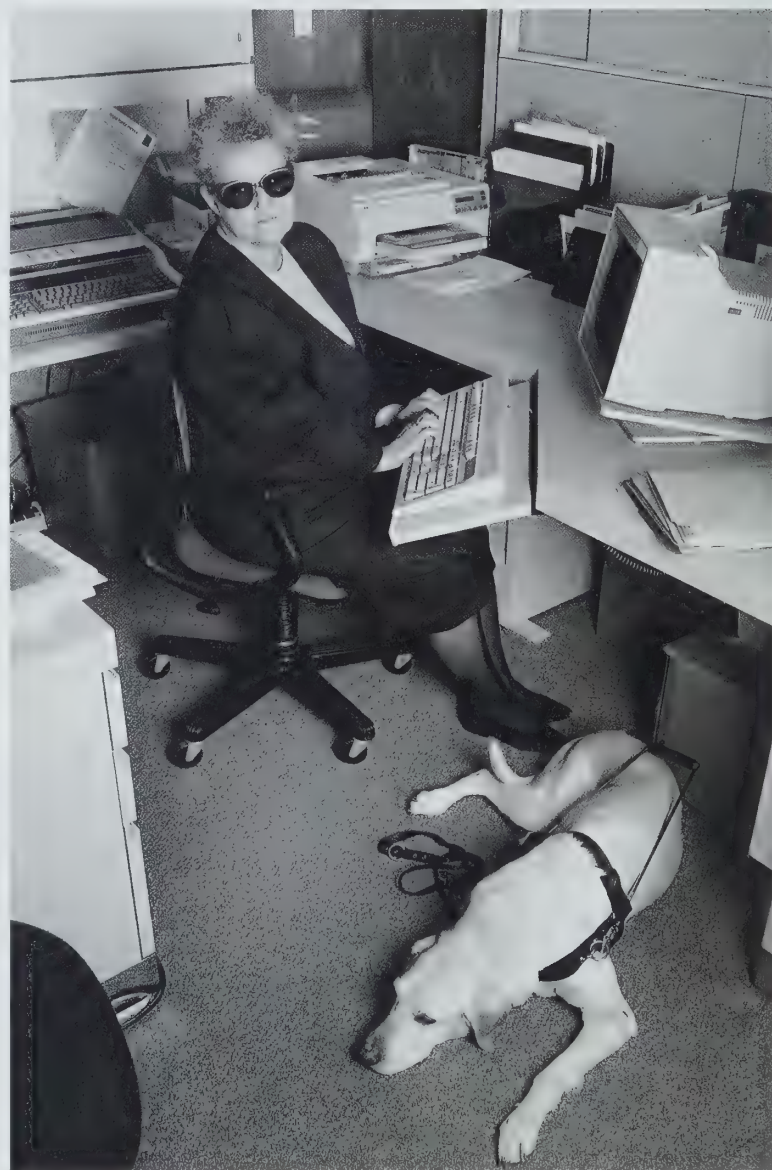
Joyce Main is a job broker for three ministries – Citizenship, Culture and Communications, and Tourism and Recreation in Toronto. As a consultant, she matches job openings to potential candidates with disabilities. Operating out of two offices with one assistant, she keeps in touch with candidates, managers, community organizations, and job placement agencies across the province; she also coaches applicants and tracks their progress.

In her experience, potential employers often see a disability as a far bigger hurdle than it actually is. "Managers don't realize that I'm referring professional, job-ready people. It's my job to convince managers that employment equity works – it's cost-effective and the manager gets a productive, long-term employee."

If they still need convincing, they

need only look at her own career. Legally blind since birth, she's taught school, handled a variety of jobs in the public and private sectors, acquired a string of degrees and certificates, worked in the disabled community, competed in the Blind Olympics, and brought up three children as a single parent. In the early days, when she had more eyesight, her employers never even knew she was blind. Now, at 53, with less than one per cent of her vision left in one eye, she uses a combination of methods to buzz around Queen's Park, including special glasses, listening skills, occasionally a cane, and her dog, Dallas. She's constantly in training to improve her coping skills.

Her message to employers? "You've got a potential resource that you haven't explored, a very productive pool of labour that could make your organization more effective. Give us an opportunity and we'll show we're productive, viable employees and productive, viable contributors to society at large." ■



**"Employment equity works –
it's cost-effective and the
manager gets a productive,
long-term employee."**



Clinton Miller

Research Analyst

At 27, CLINTON MILLER didn't have much of a career.

He'd tried being a musician. Now he had a job as a rehabilitation teacher at the CNIB, which gave him more financial security but little opportunity for advancement. 🐼 But although he's been blind since the age of two, he

says, "I never thought of blindness as a barrier." He decided to go back to school to get his master's degree in social work. Although it was tough, his plan worked. Within a few weeks of graduating he found a job at a family service agency.

Some clients didn't believe a counsellor with a disability could help them, but others came to see him as a model. A single mother wrote to him, "I see now that being on my own and bringing up my family is an ongoing problem that I can deal with day by day, just like

you deal with your blindness."

After eight years in counselling, he decided to return to school again, this time for his MBA. To make sure he got a job once he completed the degree, Miller contacted a counsellor in staffing in the government and built a network of contacts, eventually landing a research analyst's position at the Workforce Planning and Employment Equity Branch of the Management Board Secretariat in Toronto.

He's now worked in various contract positions for the branch

for a year and a half and hopes to get a permanent position. But as the person who quantifies the ebb and flow of government employees, he realizes that in future, workers with disabilities, like everyone else, will have to be extremely flexible. To avoid the "trial-and-error period" he went through in his career, Miller advises young people to get involved in volunteer work so they can find out what areas they're interested in and what qualifications they'll need. He also recommends networking and making use of the various

employment counselling and placement organizations. And how will Miller, now an experienced 40, cope with the fast-changing future? "That suits someone like me because I've always done different things. So I don't think I'll have difficulty adjusting." ■



Zena El Ghatit

Community Services Supervisor

"I think it's quite something for a woman who's handicapped and multicultural to make it."

FROM THE TIME she contracted polio as an infant, Zena El Ghatit's family and teachers "always put the emphasis where I was strong, not where I was weak." One of those strengths would form the basis of her career. Although she could still walk as a little girl, her legs were weak,

and "when you're not playing you end up talking to people instead. I recognized that one of the abilities I had was to listen." Thanks to that talent, in her first year at the American University in Cairo she was elected by fellow students to work in the student counselling centre with a famous local psychologist.

By 1974, at the age of 36, she was already a successful clinical psychologist in Egypt, when she was invited to work at Prince Edward Heights Residential Centre for the Mentally Retarded in Picton, Ont. "It was a crazy idea," she remembers. "But I'm a very high-risk person, so I said, Why not?" Two months later, she and her husband, a writer, and their two children moved to Canada.

After several successful years in Picton, she went to work for the Ministry of Community and Social Services in 1979, supervising community programs, first in Kingston and now in Ottawa. Because of the travelling involved, she wondered if she could handle the job. "But my supervisor said, 'Sure you can do it.' Sometimes when someone gives you an assignment that's beyond what you think you can do, it pushes you beyond what you thought were your limits." She currently works with 15 social services agencies with programs for physically and developmentally handicapped people in the Ottawa-Carleton region. The only real mobility problem has been the long trek from her parking

spot, through the mall of the Rideau Centre to her office, a journey she now does on a scooter.

She believes the key to success for people with disabilities is to "find something you really excel at. I think it's quite something for a woman who's handicapped and multicultural to make it. And I did it twice." ■

John Bothwell

Caseworker

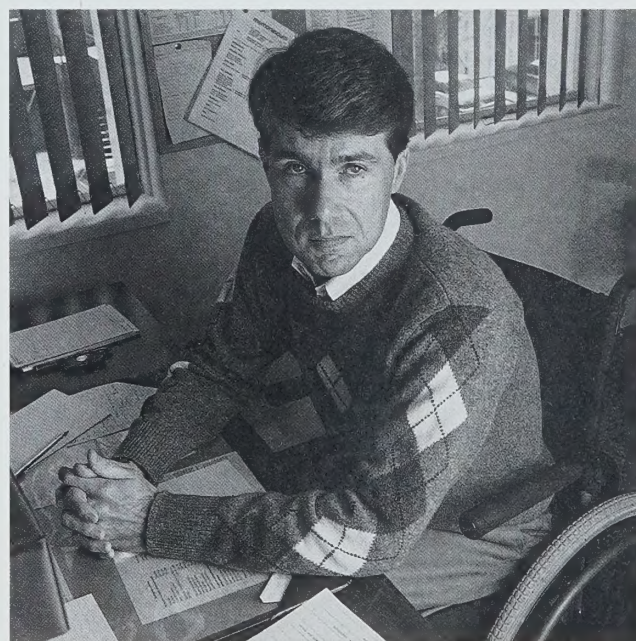
ANYONE IN HIS or her late 30s, like John Bothwell, remembers what it was like graduating from university in the 1970s – no jobs. But because he had spina bifida and walked with a cane, John had a doubly difficult time. Although they were impressed with his attitude and credentials, potential

employers decided arbitrarily that he couldn't do the job. He remembers one who told him he couldn't possibly handle stairs; ironically, he was living in a two-storey house at the time. "Deep down it got to me," he recalls. "It does something to your self-confidence."

Yet for six years, he managed to piece together a string of contract jobs, working on a grant here, doing supply teaching there. "I remember meeting one of my former employers, a public school principal, who asked me what I was doing to keep myself busy. I said I was working on another grant and he laughed. 'You're never without a job for long.'"

Finally, in 1979, he got a permanent position as a caseworker for the Ministry of Community and Social Services in Sault Ste. Marie, the job he holds today. "It was hard to believe that I'd actually landed

something. I'd always wanted to work for this ministry because it's a people ministry." He handles social assistance cases, assessing eligibility and helping his clients "access community resources" – a job he describes as "mostly administration but not losing sight of the human element." He says having a disability creates an instant rapport with his clients, because they can see someone who also has problems. Although he began using a wheelchair in the office two years ago to conserve energy, he needs only minor accommodations at work. Nevertheless, in recent years he's become more aware of the importance of networking and mutual support for people with disabilities. "I've always been pretty resourceful, even as a youngster. But it's something you need to keep working on." ■



Jean-Marc Labelle

Computer Operator

AT SOME POINT in Grade 10, Jean-Marc Labelle began to suspect that the nuns didn't understand the machines they were supposed to be teaching him about any better than he did. But he did understand that these computers were a key to the future – especially for a boy with cerebral palsy.

"I knew right from the start where I was going," he recalls. Although he had struggled through high school, working three or four hours every night just to maintain a 64-per-cent average, once he got into computer studies at Cambrian College in Sudbury, "everything started to pay off. The homework wasn't homework because I loved what I was doing." Soon his marks had soared to over 80 per cent. When community college teachers went on strike

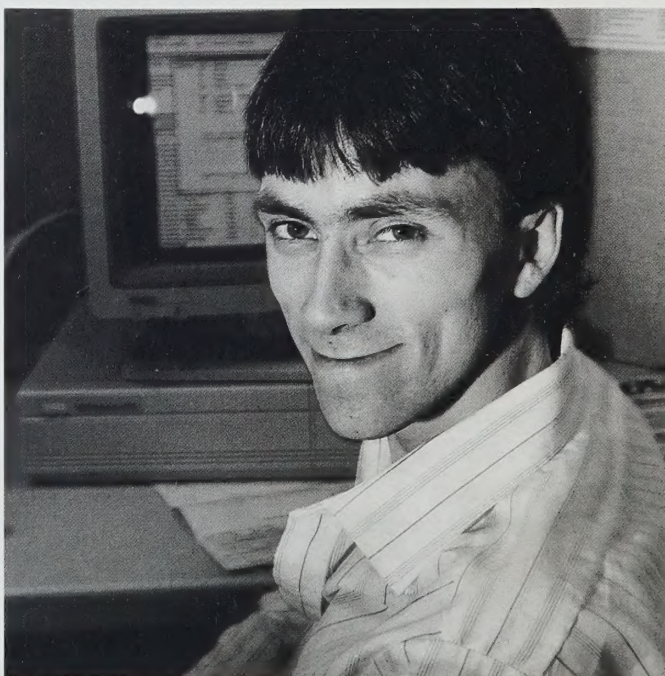
for two months, he used the time to line up a job at the Human Resources Branch of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. He stayed on after graduation and then, when that project was completed, transferred to the Information Technology Branch, where he's now on permanent staff.

Today he handles calls from users of the ministry's computer network, ensures the system is backed up every night, and generally "makes sure

everything is running the way it should be." His disability has little effect on his work life. He walks with a cane, but his job doesn't require a lot of standing or walking – except for the trip from the parking lot, where he has a disabled parking spot.

As a kid, he remembers feeling self-conscious about his disability and resenting the other kids who teased him. "But I always did everything I wanted. I'd be out there playing hockey with my brothers, using

my face to stop the puck." Now 23, he's learned to be more cautious. But he believes his tenacity has paid off. "Do what you want to do and go after what you want," he advises. "That's what I did and that's what got me where I am today." ■



"Do what you want to do and go after what you want."

2**Find Candidates**

Since candidates with disabilities may not know that you welcome their applications, you should do some active outreach recruiting. Place job orders with government and community organizations, employment and student centres, recruitment agencies, and unions. When advertising, state that you are an employment equity employer.

1**Create Opportunities**

Evaluate how well you're doing as an employment equity employer. Are there barriers to the hiring, retention, and career advancement of people with disabilities in your organization? How can those barriers be eliminated? A *physical demands analysis* will help to develop an objective understanding of what tasks are essential in the performance of a job and will help determine any job accommodations, if needed.

3**Improve Accessibility**

Barrier-free design makes a building safer and more accessible for everyone – employees, clients, and the public – and costs far less than you may expect. An existing building can be made accessible for less than it costs to clean its floors for a year, and new facilities can become barrier-free at little or no cost. To avoid expensive mistakes it's important to get the advice of experts, including your employees with disabilities.

Raise Your Profile

There are a wide range of actions that managers in the public and private sectors can take to find the kind of talented employees profiled in this magazine. The suggestions on this page are only a sampling.

4**Accommodate Workers**

Most job accommodations for workers with disabilities are usually simple adjustments such as flexible work hours or employee task tradeoffs, costing nothing. Ninety per cent cost under \$1,000, and government funding is often available. The key is increased productivity, so the best "experts" to consult when looking at any job accommodation are your employees with disabilities.

5**Retain Employees**

Once you've found talented, qualified employees, you'll want to keep them by creating a corporate culture where people with disabilities feel accepted by co-workers, have equal access to career advancement and training, and take part in corporate planning.

6**Make It Happen**

Advice, assistance, and training are available. For information, contact:

The Centre for Disability and Work
Ministry of Labour
400 University Avenue
10th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1T7

Tel: (416) 326-7810
Toll-Free: 1 (800) 465-5963
TDD: (416) 326-7561
Fax: (416) 326-6287

Profile